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ABSTRACT

A study extended previous research on second language learners' use of interlanguage knowledge in making grammaticality judgments. The grammatical construction under consideration is the existential-presentational (E-P) sentence. This construction is described, and it is shown how, due to universal constraints of information structure, it is ubiquitous across languages and at the same time, always in conflict with the canonical clause structure of the language. Use of this structure by both native and non-native speakers writing in response to a situation requiring use of E-P sentences is then examined, and results of the non-native speakers are compared to the baseline established by native speakers. Observed differences are discussed, and possible explanations are proposed. Contains 31 references. (MSE)

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Existential-presentational Sentences in Second Language Acquisition

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Introduction

These days, people studying the behavior of second language learners like to attribute the interlanguage they hear and see to unconscious psychological processes; either general, problem-solving ones or language-specific ones such as universal grammar. This paper, however, reports on an investigation into the question of how learners' conscious representations of target language structure can determine certain enduring non-native patterns in the interlanguage. In other words, if second language learners have some conscious understanding of the structure of the second language, say for example, main clause word order, it would seem that this understanding would make learners reluctant to produce main clauses that apparently deviate from this pattern. Some research to date suggests that this is indeed the case. Jordens (1988), for example, in discussing a study done by Clahsen & Muysken (1986), maintains that Turks learning German are reluctant to transfer the subject-complement-verb or SXV word order of their own language to German even when it would be grammatical. Evidently, argues Jordens, learners have already construed the canonical word order of German to be SVX and this leads them to infer that the SXV word-order of their first language is not transferable.

Similar responses by learners to marked, but grammatical

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constructions in the second language have been observed in studies of aspect and the lexicon. Gass and Ard (1984), for example, found native Spanish speakers learning English to make incorrect grammaticality judgements of sentences utilizing the progressive aspect. Gass and Ard claim that what the learners believe they know about the grammar of English and its distance from Spanish, led them to judge as grammatical sentences that would be grammatical in neither English nor Spanish. In regard to verb subcategorization, Kellerman (1985) has shown how learners' perceptions of what constitutes a marked subcategorization frame will lead them to reject that frame in the second language in spite of the grammaticality of that frame in both the second language and the first. Moreover, though learners initially accept the marked subcategorization frame, they reject it as their exposure to the second language increases. Only after greater fluency has been achieved does the learner again find the structure in question acceptable.

The purpose of this study is to extend this research. It differs from the studies described above, however, in that the interlanguage is accessed not via grammaticality judgements but through naturalistic data gathered in a narrowly focused context. The knowledge gained from the gathering and analysis of such data should buttress what has already been learned from the objective data. In what follows, I will first describe the grammatical construction under investigation, and then show how, due to universal constraints of information structure, it is ubiquitous

across languages of the world and at the same time, always in conflict with the canonical clause structure of the language. After that, we will look at the use of this structure by both native and non-native speakers writing in response to a situation that requires use of E-P sentences. The results of the non-native speaking subjects will then be compared to the baseline established by the native speakers. I will then discuss the observed differences in there response and propose possible explanations.

Existential-Presentational Sentences

A structure that is present in every language, but which is contrary to canonical constituent patterns, is the existential-presentational (E-P) sentence. Consider the sentences in (1):

1. a. There is a book on the table.
   b. On the table is a book.
   c. A book is on the table.

The first two sentences are at odds with two canonical patterns of English, namely, subject-verb-complement constituent order and the direction of agreement. In regard to constituent order, in both (1a) and (1b), the subject position is filled by an apparently adverbial element rather than a nominal one. In (1a) it is the locative expletive that occupies this position (Bolinger 1977) and in (1b), it is the locative prepositional phrase, an element that is normally post-verbal. As for the direction of agreement, in both (1a) and (1b) the verb form is

not determined by the element on the left, the usual pattern of English, but by the post-verbal NP on the right. Sentence (1c), on the other hand, is much more in keeping with the usual pattern of English declarative sentences: a nominal phrase occupies the subject position and agreement obtains between this pre-verbal element and the verb.

Of interest though, is the fact that although (1c) mirrors the canonical constituent order of the English sentence, it is, in terms of frequency of use in situations calling for an E-P sentence, the most marked. An explanation for this can be had in terms of information structure. Let's consider sentence (2), a perfectly canonical sentence that is apparently similar to those in (1), but is, pragmatically, quite different:[1]

2. The book is on the table.

As Halliday (1985) notes, the initial position in the sentence (subject in English), is the unmarked position for topics. Normally, topics are "given" information, in the sense of Chafe (1976) and in (2), givenness is overtly indicated by the presence of the definite article 'the.' The discourse function of (2) is to ascribe a property, the PP location, to 'the book,' an entity already known to both speaker and hearer and easily construed as topic.

In the sentences of (1), on the other hand, the indefinite NP, 'a book' is not a good candidate for the canonical topic position, NP of S. As Chafe points out, "indefiniteness entails

newness (42)," and as such, 'a book' is a comment, not a topic. Thus, sentences (1a) and (1b) are structural accommodations of the pragmatic principle that old information should precede new information. The location, represented cataphorically by 'there' in the topic position of (1a) and overtly by the PP containing the definite NP in (1b), is the known entity and the indefinite NP, 'a book' is the property ascribed to that known location.[2] As for the discourse function of sentences like (1a-b), they differ from (2) in that while the latter ascribe properties to referents already established, sentences like (1a-b) are "used to introduce thematically-important new referents into the discourse" (Givon 1993:206). A sentence like (2) continues on the same topic while sentences like (1a-b) establish a new one.

Existential-Presentational Sentences Cross-Linguistically

The non-canonical constituent order of E-P sentences is not limited to English. Several studies, especially those of Kuno (1971) and more recently, Hoekstra & Mulder (1990), Freeze (1992), and Bresnan (1994) demonstrate that a wide variety of languages exhibit the same structural characteristics in accommodating the pragmatic demands of introducing a new topic in an existential situation. Whether the canonical structure of declarative sentences in the language is SVX as in say, English 2and Chinese, or whether it is SXV as it is in Japanese or Korean, the existential sentence is characterized by the placement of the locative phrase into initial position. Thus,

SVX languages have XVS existential word order and SXV languages have XSV existential word order.

Below, in 3-6, are comparisons of canonical word-order to the E-P word-order in four languages. For each language, the (a) sentence presents the canonical form of a clause containing a definite subject and a locative predicate, while the (b) sentence presents the non-canonical, E-P form:

3. Japanese:

a. sono koppu ga Teiburu no ue ni aru.
that cup table 's top on is
'The cup is on the table.'

b. Teiburu no ue ni koppu ga aru
table 's top on cup exist
'There's a cup on the table.'
(from Kuno 1971)

4. Korean:

a. kŭ chaek i chaeksang e ida.
that book desk on is.
'The book is on the desk.'

b. chaeksang e chaek i iss da
desk on book exist
'There's a book on the desk.'

5. Mandarin:

a. Nà běn shū zài zhuō zi shàng
that (cls.) book on table 's top
'The book is on the table.'

b. zhuō zi shàng yǒu běn shū
table 's top have cls. book
'There's a book on the table.'

6. English:

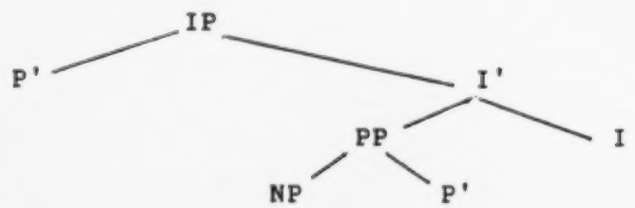
a. The book is on the table.

b. On the table is a book.
b'. There's a book on the table.

All four languages share the following three characteristics: First, as already stated, the basic constituent order of the E-P clause has the locative phrase in [SPEC IP]. Second, the NP yields an indefinite interpretation regardless of whether the indefiniteness is overtly indicated, as in English, or not. In fact, we see in the (a) sentences that if the NPs are made overtly definite via a definite determiner, as in English, or an optional demonstrative determiner, as in the other three, the more usual constituent order of the sentence is the canonical one; that is, SXV for Japanese and Korean, and SVX for Mandarin and English. The final characteristic that all E-P clauses share is the nominative status of the NP. Though this is not overtly indicated in the Chinese example, the nominative status of the NP is indicated in Japanese and Korean with the particles 'ga' and 'i' respectively and in English through verb agreement.[3]

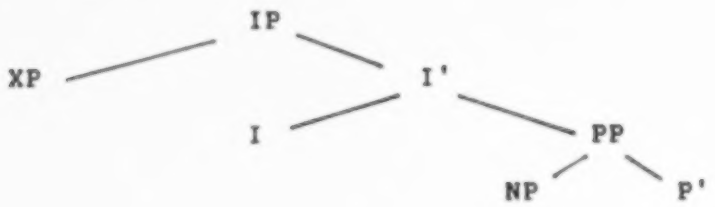
Before moving on to the study, let me first give a formal representation of the E-P sentences. I have chosen that of Freeze (1992) which utilizes the predicate-internal subject D-structures of the type found in Speas (1986) and Koopman & Sportiche (1991). It appears below in 7 & 8:

7. Japanese & Korean:



[teiburu no ue ni]$_i$ koppu ga t_i aru
[chaeksang e]$_i$ chaek i t_i issda

8. Mandarin & English:



[zhuō zi shàng]$_i$	yǒu	běn shū	t_i
[on the table]$_i$	is	a book	t_i

In this structural representation, only two trees are required to account for the four languages: one to accommodate the left-branching Korean and Japanese, and another for the right-branching English and Mandarin.[4] According to Freeze, inherent case is assigned to the location via the preposition. It can then be raised into [SPEC IP] pending the indefiniteness of the NP in [SPEC PP]. Once the P' location has been raised, PP no longer contains a head and is therefore no longer a barrier to government. Structural case can then be assigned to the NP by INFL.

We can conclude, then, that in all four languages existential-presentationals are constructed in a strikingly similar way: the indefinite NP remains in the D-structure position in the predicate while the locative phrase is raised to subject. We appear to have a formal universal specific to existential sentences that correlates with the functional universal that old information precede new.[5] Furthermore, this pattern is not limited to the four languages above; it is the pattern common to virtually all languages.[6]

The Use of Existential-presentational Sentences in English

Before examining the use of existential-presentational sentences by SL learners, we must first find out what native speakers do. Given the three possibilities for E-P sentences in English discussed earlier in (1), we expect to find constructions like (1c) to be rare and (1a-b) to be common in an existential-presentational context. As for the relative frequency of (1a) and (1b), one's expectations are uncertain. Traditionally, sentences like (1a), assumed to be the prototype of the English existential, have engendered much linguistic discussion, and might therefore be presumed to be numerically the most frequent construction to appear in an existential-presentational context. But cross-linguistically, both Kuno (1971) and Freeze (1992) point out that pronominal existentials such as the French 'Il-y-a . . .' construction or English 'there'-sentences are highly marked. Freeze, for example, says in reference to the 'there'-sentence specifically that "its connection to core grammar might be questioned" (574). We might expect then, that sentences like (1b) will be more frequent than (1a), as it is, according to Kuno, "the word order more basic" (334).

Methodology

To determine the use of existential-presentative sentences among native speakers of English, a test was given to American students enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in

the Fall of 1992 and 1993. The students, most of whom were first semester college freshman, were asked to write a "still-life" essay describing the placement of five unrelated objects on the table at the front of the room.

Of the 60 compositions collected, 10 were not used in the study because they contained no existential constructions. The writers of the ten excluded compositions recognized a context that was not existential.[7] Of the 50 compositions that were included in the study, all contained at least one existential construction and some contained as many as seven. The average was 3.72 per paper.

The typical clause sequence of the writers was to first introduce each object, such as the knife, with an existential-presentational sentence containing an indefinite NP in post-verbal position (i.e.,'At the back of the table there is a knife.'). This focusing construction was usually formed around 'be,' but unaccusative verbs, most typically 'lie,' and 'sit,' were also used. Once the topic, 'the knife,' was established, the sentence immediately following was often a descriptive comment about the object. Hence, 'a knife' became 'the knife' and occupied the [SPEC IP] position (i.e., 'It (the knife) is pointing to the right.'). The third sentence introduced the next object using 'the knife' as a point of locational reference (i.e., 'Next to the knife (there) is a book.'). This strategy was pursued until all of the objects were so located and described.

All the existential sentences found in the data were identified and sorted into one of three categories. The first category was that of 'there' sentences. As shown in (9) below, this category included 'there' sentences with or without the preposing, and hence topicalizing, of the locative phrase. The only requirement was that the expletive occupy [SPEC IP]. The second category consisted of the universally unmarked sentence wherein the locative phrase occupies [SPEC, IP]. The third category was that of the canonical NP-verb-PP sentence form. Table (9) below gives a description of the three types as well as an exemplar taken from the native-speaker data.

9.

Three Types of Existential-Presentational Sentences

1. 'there' in [SPEC, IP]

a. 'there' - 'be' - NP - (participial) - loc. P'
(ex. There is a hard-cover book standing upright in the middle of the table.)

b. (participial) - loc. P' - 'there' - verb - NP
(ex. Right next to the book there is a silver tea cup.)

2. P' in [SPEC, IP]

(participial) - loc. P' - verb - NP
(ex. Sitting in front of the knife, but slightly to the right is a set of small keys.)
(ex. Along the left side sits a silver, sorta shiny, tin cup of some sort.)

3. Indefinite NP in [SPEC, IP]

NP - verb - loc. P'
(ex. A key ring with keys on it is on the edge of the table near the front.)
(ex. A set of keys lays (sic) on the edge of the table.)

Results and Discussion

Table 10, below shows the mean percentages of the three types of E-P sentences used by the native speakers (NS). Type 1 sentences, those which include 'there,' are used at a lower rate than the universally unmarked type 2 in which the locative phrase occupies [SPEC IP] (28% v 59%). As for the type 3 sentences, grammatical in English but stylistically odd in that they are contrary to the functional demands of the communicative situation at hand, they are utilized at an average rate of only 12%.

10.

Mean Percentage of Use
by Native Speakers

Type 1 ('there')	28%
Type 2 (PP-V-NP)	59%
Type 3 (NP-V-PP)	12%

The linguistic principles said to be relevant in the production of E-P sentences account well for the data above. First of all, we stated that functionally, old information, in this case the location either in the form of the locative phrase or the locative expletive 'there,' should precede the new information, the indefinite NP. The sentences of types 1 and 2 both satisfy this functional universal. When they are added

together, we can see that 88% of the NS responses accord with the functional principle. As for the formal principle that the locative phrase occupy [SPEC IP], it too appears active in this data. The 59% mean for type 2 sentences compared to the 28% mean for type 1 shows the NS to be twice as likely to satisfy the functional universal with the sentence that Freeze and others have deemed the cross-linguistically unmarked one.

The Use of Existential-Presentational Sentences by Non-Native Speakers

Now that we have statistically characterized the responses of native speakers to an existential-presentational context, it remains to be seen how the non-native speakers (NNS) respond to the same communicative situation. So far, we have argued for the acceptance of two assumptions: The first is that the principles of information structure that determine the placement of topics in discourse apply to all languages. The second is that accommodation of this principle in E-P sentences necessitates a clausal constituent order that is marked relative to the canonical constituent order of the language; namely, the locative phrase occupies [Spec IP]. The questions thus are two: First, will non-native speakers make the appropriate discourse functional response of placing the known information, the locative topic, before the new, indefinite NP? Or, on the other hand, will they be unresponsive to discourse demands and produce an inordinate amount of canonical NP-V-PP sentences like (1c). Second, if they do make the appropriate functional response, will

this response be realized with the non-canonical but cross-linguistically ubiquitous construction whereby the locative phrase occupies [SPEC IP]? Or, will they pursue some other strategy that topicalizes the location yet preserves canonical English constituent order?

Methodology

To find the answers to these two questions, the same test was given to 75 non-native speakers of English enrolled in ESL programs. Over half of the respondents were native speakers of the languages described earlier in this paper, namely, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. The remainder were native speakers of Indonesian, Spanish, Russian, German, Hmong, Thai, and Swedish. The test was conducted in the same way as it had been for the native speakers, and again, as with the NS, a few of the NNS responses had to be rejected and I was left with 65. Although the papers produced by the NNS were remarkably similar to the native speakers, the average length of the non-native speakers' sentences was less than that of the native speakers', which meant that the NNS had a higher average number of existential sentences per paragraph than did the NS: 4.2 per paragraph versus 3.72 per paragraph for the NS. In addition, given the limited size of their active vocabularies relative to the NS, NNS were much less likely to construct existential sentences using unaccusative verbs such as 'lie' and 'sit.' They used 'be' almost exclusively.

The responses were divided into low and high proficiency groups on the basis of TOEFL scores and/or current enrollment status in the respective ESL programs.[8] The E-P sentences contained in the paragraphs were then identified and categorized the same way as they had been for the native speakers. The mean percentages of the three types of E-P sentences were determined for comparison to the native speakers. Contingency tables were then prepared to test the significance of patterns suggested by the mean percentages.

RESULTS

The first table to consider is 11. This table compares the mean percentage of use for the three types of sentences by all three groups. Column one displays the same data as (10) above for ease of comparison. An examination of row two, shows the percentage use of the unmarked type 2 sentence to be much lower among NNS of both low and high proficiency levels than among native speakers. NS use this sentence at a rate of 59% while both levels of NNS use it at a rate of only 14%. A second pattern that emerges from 12 concerns the use of the highly marked E-P sentence that adheres to main clause declarative word order. In row three, it can be seen that though NS use this sentence only 12% of the time, low-proficiency NNS, shown in column 2, use it at a much higher rate, 34%. High-proficiency NNS, on the other hand, as shown in column three, use it more sparingly, at a rate of only 19%.

11.

Mean Percentages of Use of the Three Types of E-P Sentences

	1. Native	2. Non-nat. (low)	3. Non-nat. (high)
Type 1 ('there')	28%	53%	67%
Type 2 (PP-V-NP)	59%	14%	14%
Type 3 (NP-V-PP)	12%	34%	19%

The next table, (12), shows the number of respondents in each group who produced at least one canonical, NP-verb-PP sentence. This is the sentence that is least suitable to the existential-presentational context. Again, both raw numbers and percentages are given. Only 16% of the NS respondents utilized this sentence form while over half of the low-proficiency NNS did and over one third (37%) of the high-proficiency NNS did.

12.

Respondents with at Least One Type 3, NP-verb-PP Sentence

	+	-	Total
Native	8 (16%)	42 (84%)	50
Non-nat. (low)	14 (58%)	10 (42%)	24
Non-nat. (high)	15 (37%)	26 (63%)	41
Total	37	78	115

(total dev. = 9.82, df = 2, x^2 = 5.99 @ .05 level)

Table 13 below shows the number of respondents in each group that produced at least one syntactically unmarked E-P sentence. The table gives the raw numbers from which significance was

determined as well as the percentage of the total responses in parentheses. The table shows that nearly three-fourths (74%) of the NS group produced at least one of the target sentences but only about a third of the NNS groups did. In addition, there is no significant difference in the percentages of the two NNS groups. A slightly smaller percentage of the high-proficiency NNS (29%) produced the target sentence than did the low-proficiency NNS (33%).

13. Respondents with at Least One Type 2, (PP-verb-NP) Sentence

	+	−	Total
Native	37 (74%)	13 (26%)	50
Non-nat. (low)	8 (33%)	16 (67%)	24
Non-nat. (high)	12 (29%)	29 (71%)	41
Total	57	58	115

(total dev. = 26.76, df = 2, x^2 = 5.99 @ .05 level)

The last table, (14), shows the percentage of respondents who constructed E-P sentences via 'there' or locative phrase inversion at least 50% of the time. Whereas this describes the behavior of 90% of the NS, it describes less than two thirds, 62%, of the low-proficiency NNS. High-proficiency NNS produce these E-P sentence types at a rate of 83%, a rate that approaches the NS mean.

14. Respondents with more than 50% Type 1 ('there') or Type 2 (PP-V-NP) Sentences

	+	-	Total
Native	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	50
Non-nat. (low)	15 (62%)	9 (38%)	24
Non-nat. (high)	34 (83%)	7 (17%)	41
Total	37	78	115

(total dev. = 7.29, df = 2, x^2 = 5.99 @ .05 level)

DISCUSSION

The first question under investigation is whether or not NNS respondents will accommodate the informational demands of an E-P context by placing the known location in the initial position in the sentence at the same rate as NS do. To answer this question, one might first compare the proportions of the type 3, NP-V-PP sentence among the three groups. In the type three row of table 11, one can see that whereas native speakers used the canonical, declarative sentence word order only 12% of the time, low-proficiency NNS did so at nearly three times that rate (34%). These results are reiterated by the significant differences shown between the three groups in contingency table 12. There we see that whereas only 16% of NS produced at least one canonical sentence, over half of the low-proficiency NNS (58%) did so and over one third (37%) of the high-proficiency NNS did so.

In addition to revealing greater use of the canonical E-P sentence by NNS than NS, the data in Tables 11 & 12 also suggest a learning curve leading back to the NS norm. For example, in

Table 11, we see that the low-proficiency NNS utilize the type 3, NP-V-PP word order for one third, 34%, of their responses while the high-proficiency NNS do so for only 19% of theirs. This rate is only slightly higher than the NS rate of 12%. A similar curve is found in table 12 regarding the use of at least one type three sentence. Thus, we can conclude that though NNS show some reluctance to abandon the predominant, SXV word-order pattern of English clauses, this reluctance decreases with greater proficiency in the language.

Though these data show NNS reluctant to produce more E-P sentences following the canonical sentence pattern than NS do, it should be kept in mind that this sentence type never constituted more than one third of all the E-P sentences produced by the NNS. In other words, a majority of the E-P sentence types produced by both NNS groups were of types 1 or 2, both of which satisfy the demands of the existential-presentational context. Thus, the NNS, just like the NS, recognized the context and the demands of information structure and attempted to meet them. However, they did so in a manner different from the NS.

First, consider the type two row in table 11. NS produced the cross-linguistically unmarked type 2 sentence at a rate of 59%. Non-native speakers produced this type of sentence at a rate of only 14%, a rate that does not increase with higher language proficiency. This accuracy of this observation is supported by the significant differences shown in contingency table 13. There one can see that while three fourths (74%) of NS

produced at least one of this type of sentence, only 33% of the low-proficiency subjects did and only 29% of the high-proficiency subjects. Clearly, NNS are reluctant to produce this kind of sentence with the locative phrase in [SPEC IP], and this reluctance does not decrease with proficiency level. What then are the NNS doing to meet the demands of information structure in the E-P context, particularly since we have already seen that they abandon the canonical sentence with increased proficiency in the language?

The answer appears to be 'there' sentences. If we look at column two of Table 11, we see a rate of 53% for 'there' sentences among low-proficiency NNS. In column three, we see a rate of 67% for use of this sentence by high-proficiency NNS, an increase of 14 percentage points. This increase in use of 'there'-sentences is inversely matched by the decrease in the type 3, NP-V-PP sentence as NNS subjects gain in proficiency: low-proficiency NNS have a rate of 34% while high-proficiency NNS have a rate of 19%, a drop of 15 percentage points.

That these patterns are significant is demonstrated by the contingency tables. In Table 14, regarding the number of subjects who have at least 50% type 1 and 2 responses, we see a rate of only 62% for the low-proficiency NNS. The rate increases to 83% for the high-proficiency NNS which approaches the 90% rate of the NS. Then, if we look at Table 13, we see that there is no increase between low- and high-proficiency NNS in the proportion of type 2 sentences. We must conclude that all of the increase

seen in Table 14 is due to an increase in use of the type 1, 'there'-sentence.

Conclusion

This study purported to investigate whether learner perceptions of canonical L2 constituent order would effect responses in an existential-presentational context. There appears to be some evidence indicating that they do. Though NS in this context produce a majority of E-P sentences with the locative phrase in [Spec IP], NNS produce only very few. Yet, this difference does not appear to be because NNS do not recognize the functional demands of the situation. On the contrary, even low proficiency NNS recognize the unsuitability of canonical NP-V-PP sentence: only one third of their responses were of this type. However, the NNS's sensitivity to the functional demands of the situation do not translate into the crosslinguistically unmarked E-P sentence that could presumably be directly transferred from the L1. Instead, they pursue other strategies involving the locative expletive 'there.' A likely reason for this reluctance to transfer the E-P construction from the L1 is that they have established the constituent order of the L2 to be SVX, and thus a construction wherein a locative phrase occupies subject position appears to them highly unlikely to be well-formed in the L2.

Unanswered questions, however, concern the heavy dependence of NNS on the use of 'there.' These questions are in regard to

what exactly the functional effect of 'there' is and secondly, how NNS first learn about this construction. If NNS in an E-P context "know" that the old information, in this case the location, must precede the new information, the indefinite NP, how is it that the expletive 'there' in [Spec IP] topicalizes the location and thus satisfies this basic principle of information structure? If Bolinger is literally correct in saying that " . . . existential 'there' is an extension of locative 'there' with a meaning that refers to generalized 'location'" (1977:91), perhaps NNS intuit that 'there' in [Spec IP] is a kind of cataphor of the location and that its pre-verbal presence adequately topicalizes the location. This is questionable, however. First of all, 'there' is considered by most grammarians to be a mere place holder to satisfy the demand of English for overt representation of a subject and really has no content, locative or otherwise. Moreover, a cursory inspection of the data shows that even with the expletive in [Spec IP], respondents still often preposed the locative phrase, suggesting 'there' is at best only a weak topicalizer. More could be learned about the supposed topicalizing function of 'there' if this study was repeated with attention paid to 'there'-constructions with and without locative phrase preposing by both native and non-native speakers.

An equally important factor to consider in interpreting this data is the influence of language teaching. As Sasaki points out (1990:363), questioning of non-native speakers suggests, and a sampling of ESL texts reveals (see Azar 1984, Holschuh 1991), the

'there is/are' construction is part of basic ESL and EFL curricula. It is generally taught as the existential construction. In contrast the E-P sentence with the locative phrase in subject position, is, as far as I can tell, never taught.[9] It is possible then, that whereas 'there'-constructions have been encountered in formal lessons and are therefore included in the NNS conscious grammar model of English, the sentence with the locative phrase in subject position has only been encountered naturalistically. Hence, learners are not explicitly aware of it as a possible permutation of English constituent order.

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NOTES

[1] This structural similarity is only apparent. The fact that syntactic accounts for the sentences in (4) have been so problematic relative to those for sentence (5) indicates that (5) is also syntactically quite different from the sentences in (4).

[2] This idea that the indefinite NP is a property ascribed to the location is suggested in Lyons (1985:480).

[3] That verb agreement obtains between the NP in [SPEC VP] and the verb of an existential sentence has been one of the main reasons some have rejected an analysis like this one that considers the PP as subject. One should see Chomsky (1981, 1986), Safir (1985), McCloskey (1991) for arguments to that effect. Several recent papers, however, that place the PP in [SPEC IP] have put forth proposals to explain the agreement of the verb with the NP to its right. Besides Freeze and Hoekstra & Mulder, there are analyses by Bresnan (1994) and Watanabe (1993) that bear on this issue. This paper does not participate in the debate but just assumes the correctness of the PP-as-subject analysis.

[4] Though the Mandarin sentence seems anomalous given its translation with 'have' instead of 'be' and the absence of a preposition in the locative phrase, both Lyons (1967) and Freeze (1992) make convincing arguments showing 'have' existentials to be derivationally related to those with 'be.' Freeze, for example, considers human subjects such as 'I' in 'I have a book.' to be locations. He notes that though in English the 'have' derivation is usually restricted to human locations, it can be extended to non-human locations if the sentence contains a PP whose object is an anaphor of the subject. Thus, we can get a 'have' existential in English that parallels the Mandarin existential in (8b): The table has a book on it.

[5] Freeze (1990) is not at all concerned with information structure. In fact, if linear precedence is meant in the proposal that old information must precede new, then information structure and Freeze's formal analysis are not compatible. He points out that in VXS languages such as Chamorro [SPEC IP] is right-branching and that raising of PP in existentials results in a VS-PP S-structure. Thus, the old information, the PP, does not precede the new. However, if we assume that precedence is hierarchical, not linear, the proposal in this paper can be extended to VXS languages. [SPEC IP] is the first and only phrasal node immediately dominated by IP. Hence, it "precedes" VP and NP.

[6] Other GB theorists who have looked into existential-presentationals, such as Kuno (1971) Hoekstra & Mulder (1990),

and Watanabe (1993) would accept Freeze's assertion that the locative phrase occupies [SPEC IP] and is therefore the structural subject. Bresnan (1994), on the other hand, working in an LFG framework maintains that though the locative PP is the "functional subject," as a non-nominal element,it cannot properly occupy [SPEC IP]. She therefore maintains that at the configurational level of representation, the locative phrase occupies [XP S], the position of topics.

[7] As defined by Sperber & Wilson (1986:15), contexts are "psychological constructs" based upon the hearer's "assumptions about the world." They point out that the "mechanisms of verbal communication . . . make successful communication probable, but do not guarantee it." Given that a handful of students in each test group wrote from a set of assumptions different from everyone else, this lack of a guarantee must apply to written communication as well as spoken.

[8] TOEFL scores could not be obtained for all the respondents. The mean scores for the 42 high proficiency respondents is based on 31 scores and the mean of the 24 low-proficiency respondents is based on only 10.

[9] Inverted subjects in sentences like 'On the table is a book.' are not found in basic level ESL grammar texts, but they are found in reference texts intended for ESL teachers. Celce-Murcia & Larson-Freeman (1983), for example, have two and a half pages on "Word Order Focus" in which they discuss the discourse constraints that would result in a sentence like 'In the garden stands an elm tree' (405). However, this should be compared to the entire chapter they give to the expletives 'it' and 'there.' Moreover, basic ESL texts commonly explain 'there is/are' in terms of "existence" and typically use example sentences that include locative PPs:

a. There is a bird in the tree
(Azar 1984)

b. There is a phone in the next room.
(Holschuh 1991)

We have to conclude that the respondants in this study most likely encountered 'there' in a formal lesson whereas they were exposed to inverted subject constructions naturally.

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APPENDIX

One Example of a Native
Speaker Composition

A tan and red book stands vertically in the middle of a table. Along the left side sits a silver, sorta shiny, tin cup of some sort. Directly to the rear left of the table that I look at sits a blinder (sic) of some sort. On the north side you will find pictures of Chinese people doing different things. North of the blinder (sic) there is a knife. The knife has a brown handle and the blade doesn't touch the table top, due to the way it is situated or sitting on the table. On the front left side, towards the middle, sits a pile of keys. The keychain which holds the keys together is white with a blue edge. There are about five or so keys. One key sticks out over the others. Because it has a black head.

One Example of a Non-native
Speaker Composition
(High Proficiency)

On the silver greenish table in the 215 class there are five different objects. From my point of reference, a rather blunt, brown clutched pocket knife sit in the left front edge of the table. Beside it, on the very right corner on the table, there is a green medium sized U-W library book. On the top of it there is five keys. Three of them has black handles one has red and the other has yellow handle. A piece of paper is on the middle of the book acts a bookmark. On the back rather left of the book there is an black oriental antiques with four people playing instruments ornament. The antiques is standing on its eight legs.